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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 3170

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINS, IN, SK

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENTS IN SIKKIM

REF: NEW DELHI 2950

SUMMARY: THE CHOGYAL OF SIKKIM RETURNED TO SIKKIM BUT NOT UNTIL AFTER A VIOLENT INCIDENT ON THE INDO-SIKKIM BORDER. A SIKKIM CONGRESS YOUTH LEADER WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED IN THE FRAY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE CHOGYAL REMAINS CONVINCED THAT HE WAS THE INTENDED VICTIM OF AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON FEBRUARY 21. THE MEA REGARDS THE CHOGYAL'S CHARGE AS THE "HEIGHT OF ABSURDITY." THE GOI IS ALSO DISTURBED ABOUT THE CHOGYAL'S BEHAVIOR IN KATHMANDU. IT IS LIKELY THE GOI WILL NOT RESUME ITS DIALOGUE WITH THE CHOGYAL UNTIL THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN SIKKIM SETTLES DOWN. END SUMMARY.

1. THE CHOGYAL OF SIKKIM RETURNED TO GANGTOK MARCH 4 AFTER A VIOLENT INCIDENT ON THE WEST BENGAL-SIKKIM BORDER WHICH LEFT A LEADING SIKKIM CONGRESS PARTY MEMBER SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. ACCORDING TO MARCH 5 PRESS REPORTS, THE CONGRESS MEMBERS OF THE SIKKIM ASSEMBLY SUBSEQUENTLY CONDEMNED THE

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CHOGYAL'S PARTY FOR ITS ROLE IN THE INCIDENT AND CALLED

FOR THE "IMMEDIATE REMOVAL" OF THE CHOGYAL FROM SIKKIM. THE CHOXYAL'S LAWYER TOLD US MARCH 6 (AFTER HAVING SPOKEN WITH THE CHOXYAL THE DAY BEFORE) THAT DESPITE THE ASSEMBLY'S ACTION AND THE INCIDENT, THE CHOXYAL REMAINS UNPERTURBED, IS "OF GOOD CHEER", AND IS DETERMINED AS BEFORE TO REMAIN IN GANGTOK.

2. ACCORDING TO THE INDIAN PRESS, GENERAL SECRETARY POUDYAL OF THE SIKKIM YOUTH CONGRESS WAS STABBED BY A MEMBER OF THE CHOXYAL'S PALACE GUARD AS THE CHOXYAL CROSSED INTO SIKKIM. POUDYAL WAS APPARENTLY LEADING A DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE CHOXYAL'S RETURN. ALTHOUGH THE SIKKIM CONGRESS PARTY DECLARED MARCH 5 THAT THE WOUNDS RESULTED FROM A "DASTARDLY" ATTACK BY ONE OF THE CHOXYAL'S GUARDS, THE CHOXYAL TELEPHONED HIS LAWYER IN NEW DELHI THAT HE DID NOT WITNESS THE INCIDENT BUT UNDERSTOOD POUDYAL HAD LEAPED INTO THE WEST BENGAL CONVOY JEEP IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE CHOXYAL'S RETURN. THE STABBING RESULTED. ACCORDING TO THE CHOXYAL'S LAWYER, THE INCIDENT WAS GREATER POTENTIAL POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE THAN MEETS THE EYE BECAUSE THE GOI AND THE SIKKIMESE MODERATES, INCLUDING THE KAZI, HAD BEEN BUILDING UP POUDYAL AS A YOUTH LEADER IN ORDER TO UNDERCUT THE KAZI'S STEPSON KKHATIAWADA (PARA 5 REFTTEL), WHO IS PRESSING FOR RADICAL LAND REFORM AND IS SAID TO BY SYMPATHETIC TO THE CHINESE. AS EVIDENCE OF THE CURRENT INSTABILITY WITHIN THE RULING CAMP, THE CHOXYAL'S LAWYER SAID SHE HAD HEARD (PRESUMABLY FROM THE CHOXYAL) THAT KHATIWADA WAS RECENTLY CONFINED TO HOUSE ARREST AS A RESULT OF HIS NAXALITE POLITICKING.

3. THE CHOXYAL'S LAWYER CONFIRMED TO US THAT THE CHOXYAL REMAINS CONVINCED AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE ON HIS LIFE FEBRUARY 21. HE TOLD THE LAWYER THAT A JEEP WITH FOUR MEN HALTED IN FRONT OF HIS MERCEDES SIX MILES OUTSIDE OF GANGTOK (AFTER HE HAD PASSED BEYOND ABOUT FIFTY DEMONSTRATORS), SOMETHING WAS HURLED BY ONE OF THE MEN AT HIS CAR, AND THE JEEP AND SEVERAL OF THE MEN FLED IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. THE INDIAN POLICE OFFICER ACCOMPANYING THE CHOXYAL IN HIS CAR CONFIRMED TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CHOXYAL THAT SOME "MISSILE" HAD BEEN TOSSED AT THE CAR AND RECOMMENDED THAT THEY RESUME THE JOURNEY PROMPTLY. APART FROM THE DAMAGED WINDOW THE CHOXYAL EVIDENTLY HAS NO OTHER HARD INDICATION THAT THIS WAS A GENUINE ATTEMPT TO KILL HIM.

4. THE MEA DIRECTOR OF NORTHERN DIVISION, WHO OVERSEES SIKKIMESE AFFAIRS, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER MARCH 5 THAT

THE CHOGYAL'S ALLEGATION REPRESENTED THE "HEIGHT OF ABSURDITY." THE MEA OFFICIAL WAS PARTICULARLY OFFENDED THAT THE CHOGYAL SPREAD THE STORY AMONG VARIOUS HIGH-RANKING GUESTS DURING THE CORONATION, AND SAID THAT ONE OF THE TWO GOI MINISTERS ATTENDING THE CEREMONY CAUTIONED THE CHOGYAL ABOUT HIS BEHAVIOR. RANA SAID THAT LORD MOUNTBATTEN, AT THE INDIAN MINISTER'S REQUEST, ALSO REBUKED THE CHOGYAL FOR SPREADING HIS ASSASSINATION STORY.

5. THE MEA OFFICIAL SAID FURTHER THE GOI HAD TAKEN NOTE OF THE CHOGYAL'S "SUBSTANTIVE TALKS" ON INDO-SIKKIMESE RELATIONS WITH VARIOUS FOREIGN OFFICIALS IN KATHMANDU. (THEHAHOGYAL'S LAWYER TOLD US MARCH 6 THAT KING BIRENDRA HAD SPENT AN HOUR WITH THE CHOGYAL, TWICE AS MUCH TIME AS WITH ANY OTHER GUEST, BUT CHINESE VICE PREMIER CHEN HSI-LIEN HAD ONLY EXCHANGED A FEW MINUTES' CONVERSATION OF LITTLE OR NO SUBSTANCE WITH THE CHOGYAL.) REFERRING TO BOTH THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SIKKIM AS WELL AS THE CHOGYAL'S STAY IN KATHMANDU, THE MSA OFFICIAL POINTEDLY OBSERVED THAT THE CHOGYAL "WILL HAVE TO ACCOMMODATE HIMSELF" TO CURRENT REALITIES IF HE IS TO KEEP HIS PRESENT STATUS. ASKED TO COMMENT ON THE CHOGYAL'S MOST RECENT CALL FOR A "FREE AND FAIR REFERENDUM" TO DETERMINE THE WILL OF THE SIKKIMESE PEOPLE WITH REGARD TO ASSOCIATION WITH INDIA, THE MEA OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE APRIL 1974 ELECTIONS WHICH THE SIKKIM CONGRESS SWEEPED IN EFFECT WAS SUCH A REFERENDUM. RANA SAID IN PASSING THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT HAD BEEN "GAZETTED" ON MARCH 1 SO IT WAS NOW IN FORCE.

6. OUR LAWYER INFORMANT SAID THE GOI HAD BEEN STALLING IN RECENT WEEKS ON A FURTHER ROUND OF TALKS WITH THE CHOY GAL.
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FOREIGN SECRETARY KEWAL SINGH HAD INVITED THE CHOGYAL TO SET A DATE EARLY THIS YEAR, HE DID SO FOR EARLY FEBRUARY, BUT THE FOREIGN SECRETARY NOW APPEARS DISINTERESTED. THE LAWYER SPECULATED THE NEXT ROUND WOULD NOT TAKE PLACE EARLIER THAN APRIL, SINCE THE GOI COULD NOT REALLY SAY ANYTHING POSITIVE TO THE CHOGYAL AT THIS TIME.

7. COMMENT: IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE GOI WILL ALSO WANT TO AWAIT A CLARIFICATION OF THE INTRA-SIKKIM CONGRESS SQUABBLING BEFORE IT TALKS TO THE CHOGYAL. THE INDIAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE WILL PROBABLY BE CALLED UPON TO RESTORE AT LEAST A SEMBALANCE OF ORDER TO THE SIKKIM SCENE. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE REPORTED HOUSE ARREST OF THE RADICAL YOUTH LEADER KHATIAWADA IS A STEP IN THIS DIRECTION. THE MEA OFFICER WITH WHOM WE SPOKE MARCH 5 PROFESSED NOT TO BE

DISTURBED BY THE REPORTS OF POLITICAL INFIGHTING COMING OUT OF GANGTOK, SAYING IT REFLECTED THE "BEGINNING OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS" IN SIKKIM. OUR LAWYER FRIEND INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT THE KAZI'S BASE OF SUPPORT IS IN GROWING QUESTION, THAKT ONE MEMBER OF THE ASSEMBLY REPORTEDLY HAS PREDICTED HE COULD RALLY TWENTY-TWO OF THE THIRTY-SIX MEMBERS AGAINST THE SIKKIM GOVERNMENT BY THE END OF 1975.

8. IN THE MEANTIME, THE GOI IS LIMITING THE SCOPE FOR OUTSIDE, INDEPENDENT OBSERVATION BY DENYING ALL FOREIGNERS PERMISSION TO VISIT SIKKIM. A VARIETY OF DIPLOMATS WHO HAVE APPLIED TO VISIT GANGTOK IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS HAVE ALL BEEN TURNED DOWN. WE ARE NOT EVEN TRYING.
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